

To the Members of the Methodist Ecumenical Conference

A PLEA FOR CANADIAN CHURCH UNION BY A
CANADIAN METHODIST

Dear Brethren,—Yesterday I met on the street a leading Presbyterian minister. He said, "Our position and yours on this question are identical. We desire to retain our old filial relations with the Presbyterian Churches at home as you desire to do with the Methodists. We also desire to secure the brotherhood of Methodism as you of Presbyterianism." This, brethren, expresses our common attitude in Canada. It is not that we are dissatisfied with our old affiliations. It is not that we could think of parting with them except with heartfelt sorrow. It is only that a crisis is upon us which seems to us to demand that we should unite our forces for the one object of promoting the Kingdom of Christ in this land which God has given us; and in this effort we desire nothing more earnestly than the sympathy, prayers, and help of our brethren, both Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational, in the Old Land. What is our position? In ten years we have grown from a people of five millions to eight millions. Peoples of all nations of Europe and Asia and from the United States of America have been pouring in upon us at the rate of three hundred thousand a year. About one-half of these come from Great Britain and Ireland, and about half the number from the United States, and the remainder from other countries. For all these we are called upon as Canadian Churches to provide the ordinances and influence of the Gospel. This is an entirely new situation. In time past our immigration has brought with it a large influx of Christian people with their ministers and church institutions. This was especially the case with the various branches

1912 ?
m. d.

of Methodism. With the United Empire Loyalist immigration in 1784 and after, there came the Methodist itinerants from the United States. With the English immigration in later years there came English Wesleyan missionaries, and a little later Bible Christians, New Connexion and Primitive Methodists, in each case men of experience fitted to lay the foundations of Christian Churches. But now out of a million British immigrants we find a small percentage of church members. We have been obliged to send over from year to year to collect a few young local preachers to help supply the need of religious ordinances. The people who are coming to us now seem to be largely unchurched people, those who have drifted away from the religious ties of the past. Out of 120,000 British immigrants of our last returns our immigration chaplains at Halifax, Quebec and Montreal have found but four thousand who acknowledged themselves Methodists, and I do not know that other churches have fared better. This means that seventy-five per cent. of the British immigration comes to us for evangelization. Of course with the non-English-speaking people the case presents a still more difficult problem, and the immigration from the United States is much like that from Britain, but weighted with problems of its own. It is perhaps not too much to say that two-thirds or three-fourths of the population pouring in upon us are Christless, and if our country is to remain vitally Christian we must bring to bear upon them the saving power of the gospel.

The religious forces of our country, as those of the whole Christian world, must be distinguished as Catholic or Evangelical. Romans, and part of the Anglicans and Lutherans are Catholic and Sacramentarian. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists, with some smaller bodies, are Evangelical. That is, nearly half our population, as it stood ten years ago, are Catholic, and of these the Roman Catholics are the largest, most compact and best organized body in the Dominion; if the Evangelical Protestants could be brought to work together they would be nearly, or perhaps quite, equal. But between these two bodies of Christians there is no hope of unity. They differ so widely that they scarcely acknowledge the validity of the Christianity each of the other. This is one important phase of our situation. We are,

all told, little more than two millions of Evangelical Christians, less than seven hundred thousand communicants, to grapple with not only the salvation of our own children and adherents of our churches, but also with that of three millions of outside population thrown upon our hands in the last ten years. At the same time we have our foreign missions in China, Japan, India, Africa and elsewhere. Can you wonder that we feel compelled to economize and consolidate our forces?

But on the other hand we have reason to believe that for the past fifty years God has been preparing our churches for this work now on their hands, and has by His providence and Spirit been pointing out our way of duty. Sixty years ago Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists were far apart and prejudiced against each other. Methodists thought Presbyterians without much religion and Presbyterians thought Methodists ignorant and fanatical, and both could remember the days when pulpit fulminations on the Five Points were quite common. But just after the Crimean war and the Indian Mutiny, came the day of great revivals on this continent as also in Europe, the Fulton Street prayer-meeting in New York, the Ulster revivals, the work of Moody and Sankey. Then came the call from India which brought our Evangelical Churches together in the New Year week of prayer, and as Calvinist and Arminian called upon God in united supplication we began to say, "We pray alike, we sing the same praises, we rejoice in the same Saviour, are we not all brothers of one family?" Again and again in our cities, towns and country villages, the week of united prayer was only the beginning of a revival, lasting for weeks, multiplying the converts in all our churches. I remember one Scotch Presbyterian Church in which in one winter the communicants were multiplied from five hundred to a thousand souls. The old dividing dogmas were forgotten by us all as our hearts were quickened and filled with the central vital truths of the common gospel. Then followed the era of unification. Presbyterians, by two succeeding movements, became all one body in 1875; Methodists by two successive movements became one body in 1883, and these movements were followed by wonderful showers of blessing. At our union we Methodists numbered 165,000 members in society in a Methodist popu-

lation of 748,000, or one member for $4\frac{1}{2}$ population. In 1894, eleven years later, our members in society were 261,000 in a population of 848,000, or one member for a little over 3 of population. In 1901-2 our Methodist population was 917,000 and membership 283,000, or one in a little over three or practically the same ratio to the population. With 1901-2 began the great influx of population, in eight years following our membership has grown to 340,000, an addition of 57,000. The population we cannot give until the latest census is published.

But now we are called to consider no longer the population calling themselves Methodist, but the population out of Christ, and we find that population multiplying by millions, and our brethren of all evangelical churches face the same problem. And for this problem we have but the one common remedy, the salvation of the individual man by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and this by a vast movement of evangelistic effort. And for this effort God has prepared Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists alike by His blessing upon the evangelism of the last fifty years. Our churches are all thoroughly imbued with the spirit of evangelism, and our experience is that it can be prosecuted far more successfully by united than by divisive efforts.

But another consideration presses upon us with no less force. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." It has been said, "Why don't you grow your own preachers?" Our answer is, "We are doing that to as great an extent as any other church in Christendom." We have to-day 695 young men in training for our ministry, or one for every 489 communicants, and in addition we have 2,589 local preachers and over 1,000 exhorters, many of whom are looking to the ministry. We have received an average of 160 candidates for our ministry every year for the last four years, or more than ten per cent. of our effective ordained ministry. We profess to wait for the call of God to this ministry and we have not been disappointed. But if we are wasting the men whom God has so called in unholy rivalry instead of using them to the best advantage, can we expect God to do other than make us feel our error and sin by straitening us in our work? A waste of the Lord's money of which we are only stewards is

bad enough; a waste of the lives of His called men is worse. And now every man is needed; and trained, qualified, experienced men are needed; are we justified in keeping more than are needed of our best men in our old churches and sending inexperienced young recruits to contend with each other in striving to found rival churches in our new territory? Will they be likely most effectively to accomplish the tremendous task of evangelizing these masses of Christless population now thrown into our hands by the providence of God? Would not John Wesley, if he were here to-day, join hands with all evangelical men in such a work as this?

But someone has said, "By union with the Presbyterians and Congregationalists you will lose the characteristic qualities and atmosphere of Methodism." But was not this the characteristic quality of Methodism from the beginning, its emphasis upon a definite religious experience of salvation by faith? Did it spring not out of the Holy Club, but out of the experience of the 24th of May, 1738? Was not its first sermon the proclamation of this salvation? Has it not lived and grown by that fundamental experience ever since? And is not this experience the fundamental thing to-day with a Congregational Moody, with a Presbyterian Drummond as well as with a Methodist Sankey or Hugh Price Hughes to-day? Believe me, brethren, this it is which we are all setting before us as the end of our united efforts for Canada to-day; and while that is the case we shall not get far away from the essential quality of Methodism.

But you say, "What about that universal love of God manifest in the atoning work of Christ? Only this, that our Presbyterian friends are as anxious to set that forth to-day as we are. What about the individual responsibility based upon the *autexousia* of the human will? Again they emphasize that as do we side by side with the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. What about Christian perfection? You will find that too in our basis, in Mr. Wesley's favorite form of perfect love. What about the joyous testimony of Christian experience in the class-meeting? We have found that a Scotchman, and especially a Highlandman, can be just as happy and give as inspiring a testimony as an old-fashioned Methodist? And do not these things give you both the essential quality and the atmosphere of Methodism, perhaps even improved

by the quiet perseverance and strength of Presbyterianism? Scotland has already given us many of our finest types of Canadian Methodism. Why then should we not follow the line by which God has led us up to the present and in which His providence and Spirit still seem to say, "Go forward"? Nay, will we not be guilty if we do not so do? We only hope that we may do so with your blessing and still holding you by a brother's hand.

I have said that we dare not retrench our work in the foreign field that we may accomplish that which we must do at home. In that work we stand not alone as a Canadian Church or Churches as we must do in our home evangelization. All the evangelical churches of Europe and America are with us in China, India and Japan. But we have an interest in that work peculiar to ourselves and the United States. Next to our own household the next people of importance to us are neighbors. China, Japan and India are our next door neighbors. Already they are crossing the sea to visit us. You can find their signs on every business street in Toronto. In British Columbia you will find that Japanese, Chinese and Hindoos have already monopolized each some one industry of the country. They are already with us by tens of thousands. They are nearly half the world's population, and commerce with them will be one of the chief elements of our national life. Shall we meet them as Christian brothers or as despised heathen? This question next to the moral and religious character of our own people is for us most vital, and adds to our responsibility and the problem of our churches.

To face these tasks, brethren, we believe that we shall be stronger, more successful and more perfectly in harmony with the will of God by uniting as one people for the carrying forward of the work of God, and we only crave your sympathy, your prayers, your blessing and your brotherly Godspeed.

